Some Thoughts on Dickens[1]

by

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If we are going to talk about Dickens we first must have a basic understanding of the man, the years in which he wrote, and the things, the books, the theses which be developed. But first of all, as you probably know without my telling you, he belongs predominantly to the Victorian period. You probably know, too, that that was, at heart, a period when sociology was beginning to come into something of its own. People attempted, at least, to lead the Englishman into thinking that the poor man deserves sympathy and understanding; that there should be something in his life to lighten it, to give him some hope for the future. If we take this little quotation that I'm going to give you from Dickens I think it will help you to remember just what he did and what he intended to do as a writer, and probably as a sociologist. He said this during the early days of his writing – this was his ambition: (quote) "To leave one's hand lastingly upon the times, with one tender touch for the mass of toiling people that nothing can obliterate, would be to lift oneself above all the Doges in their graves and stand upon a giant staircase that Samson could not overthrow."

So there you find the very heart and soul of Dickens. He wanted not only to make a name for himself, I suppose, but rather he wanted to make that name in a very human, a very humane way. He thought he could best leave the mark of his pen upon the minds of succeeding ages if he worked for the poor. Again, you find through a lot of his sketches, a lot of his writings, the few words, "I must strike a blow for the poor." It became almost an obsession with him; so that we think frequently more of Dickens as the writer attempting to improve the human lot of man than we do of Dickens the writer of literature, or Dickens the novelist, or Dickens the litterateur. He worked so hard and so long on the amelioration of the conditions which surrounded the poor people of England that he became a kind of patron saint to them.

I suppose I could stand here and say that he accomplished a great deal in his writings. Now, practically every one of his novels was a thesis, a thesis in which he attempted to prove a given point. And in so many of them he struck his "blow for the poor" as he spoke of it. He worked against the pettifogging lawyers of his day who did much to mulct the poor people of what little money they had. He worked against the bad, the inefficient, the badly-established and badly-conducted schools, the private schools of his day. He worked against the conditions in the debtors prisons of the nineteenth century. So practically every one of the novels was written simply to justify his thinking on some subjects very close to the heart of the English poor.

Of course, he was not born with a golden spoon in his mouth; and probably if he had been he would never have come to know what he did get to know in a very personal, intimate way about the poor. Those of you who remember something of his early life may remember the days when they -- the Dickens family in their poverty -- were forced to send young Charles out into the streets to pawn the few possessions they had: the books, the little bit of silver that was theirs, the

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bedsteads, the chairs, and the tables until literally the family was living in an empty house as far as furniture and furnishings were concerned. So he was not talking, so to speak, without a rather deep, firm knowledge of his subject matter. You may remember that his father went to jail at one time because he could not pay his debts. (A rather fantastic notion prevalent in that day [was] that a man out of jail was not half as able to pay his debts as a man inside the jail!) So he went to jail because of the nonpayment of debts. But in a very comfortable [and] convenient way, such folk were allowed to bring their families with them, so if the debtor went to the debtor's jail, and in this case he brought with him Mrs. Dickens and all the Dickens family except Charles. Charles was old enough to fend for himself; so they hired a little room for him on Lance Street in the central part of London, got him a job in a blacking factory at Hungerford Stairs. He earned something like six or seven shillings a week [missing audio] shillings at the rate of a shilling a day in London, and on Saturday he presented himself to the gatekeeper of the debtor's prison and there he spent the weekend with his mother, father, his brother, and his sisters.

Now, that I give you only that you may see that Dickens was a poor boy to begin with. He knew the sufferings of poverty and it was rather too bad because in his case much of the suffering came from the father's casual, careless way with money. The father worked, had a rather good position in the Navy pay office. He was paid, let us say on Monday; they lived high on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday, a little lower on Thursday and Friday; they just existed on Saturday, and probably went out to dinner with somebody else on Sunday. And that was the way the Dickens family went. So Dickens knew, too, some of the causes of poverty apart from the exactitudes of the Industrial Revolution, which was then just coming into being.

Here is a rather interesting little vignette which I have taken from *The Old Curiosity Shop.* [It is] a picture of a poor home, and yet how much affection Dickens attached to a home (rather than to a house) because of the people who lived in it, be they rich or be they poor.

> Let us linger in this place for an instant, to remark that if ever household affections and loves are grateful things, they are grateful and they are graceful in the poor. The ties that bind the wealthy and the proud to a home may be forged on earth but those which link the poor man to his humble hearth are of the true metal and bear the stamp of heaven. The man of high descent may love the halls and lands of his inheritance as a part of himself, as trophies of his birth and power. His associations with them are associations of pride, of wealth, and of triumph. The poor man's attachment to the tenement he holds, which strangers have held before, and may tomorrow occupy again, has a worthier root struck deep into a purer soil. His household gods are of flesh and of blood with no alloy of silver, gold, or precious stone. He has no property but in the affections of his own heart and when they endear their flaws and woes, despite rags and toil and scanty meals, that man has his love of home from God and his rude hut becomes a solemn place.

You may remember reading somewhere Sam Johnson's saying, "When a man is tired of London he is tired of living." Well, Charles Dickens felt that way, too; but whereas Johnson loved London largely because of London itself, Dickens loved it because of the poor, the variety of people who lived there, the different things they did, the different things they accomplished, and

the different kinds of lives they lived. So that in loving London because of the poor, he loved the poor probably because of their London inadequacies and insufficiencies. So that, again, all of his books are written around these London poor. Frequently, as you may remember, he goes outside London. He may lay the scenes, many scenes, of his books in towns and villages outside London. But essentially the spirit and the atmosphere of practically every novel that I can think of at the moment is London, and of London.

Now, Dickens was an optimist. I suppose we have to write that across our memories if we are to acknowledge and get to know actually what Dickens did in his lifetime. No man less than an optimist could have attempted to do the things he did, could have succeeded in doing some of the things which he accomplished. He believed that the world was rolling on to an end but, as he said, improving each year so that not only on Christmas Day do we acknowledge that our fellowman is an equal, but on every day of the year we are coming nearer, as he put it, to that particular ideal. The wheel of time is rolling on for an end; and the world is in all essentials better, gentler, more forbearing, and more hopeful as it rolls. I think probably one of the gratifying things in Dickens's life was the fact that he lived to see some of the betterment, some of the improved and changed conditions among the populace of London. For example, he lived to see the demolition of the Fleet Street Jail that was one of the famous jails used for debtors in his day. He lived to see the abolition of the Yorkshire type of school, which probably was everything which a school should not be. He lived to see the small-town mean, dishonest lawyer get his comeuppance.

Now Dickens was, and I suppose for us this is of great interest, sincerely and deeply dedicated to education. He, as you probably know, was not an educated man himself in the formal sense of the word; as a matter of fact he did not get the equivalent of what we could call a good grammar school education today. But Dickens had the verve and the ambition and the intelligence to educate himself so that in some sense he made up -- filled in the gaps -- left by the lack of a good high school education. He learned shorthand so that he might come up in the world as a court stenographer -- as a stenographer in the meetings of Parliament, and so on. That will show you something of the man's ambition.

As a result, I think, of the lack of his education he was resolved to do something *for it* so that his children and his children's children and the children of London might not be lacking. As a matter of fact, I think that is one of the great obsessions of Dickens's life. It probably accounts in part for his early death. He experienced so much unpleasant poverty that he was resolved that his own children should have what they needed, particularly in an educational way. And that is why we find the man writing against time. We find him giving lectures against time, giving readings against time, travelling to this country to pursue the same things here, reading for his audiences and lecturing to his audiences. He rolled up in his day, during his visit to this country, over a hundred thousand dollars, which in the nineteenth century was a lot of money. And yet it was not that he could use all of that himself; it was not even that he had the ambition to, but rather he wanted his children to have it and to have the advantages that went with it. So that is why we find him working always against the deadlines which he had set for himself: enough money to take care of the Dickens family.

So many of his books, then, are dedicated to the proposition that something must be done about education. Now, to understand fully the condition of the times, we should recognize first of all the fact that there was no system of public elementary education in England during Dickens's day. The schools were, where they existed at all, private schools. The different Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church had established their schools out of their own private funds. But of course all denominations in those days lacked sufficient money to build school systems on a good, firm, well-established basis. So the private schools flourished, not the parochial type belonging to the Protestant Church or the Catholic church, but rather the schools run for profit by Englishmen in various parts of the country.

Now, particularly infamous at the time were those schools called the Yorkshire schools. If you know your English topography you may remember that Yorkshire is in the northern part of England. It is a little bit removed from London and schools were established there by men who first of all were uneducated themselves, who had no university degrees or background of any kind, and who were motivated ninety-nine percent of the time by a desire for profit, and who too frequently – with all those inadequacies – were also mean, and even vicious.

Dickens heard something about these schools and he and a friend of his went up into the Yorkshire section to look around, to make a study. What he found amazed him and shocked him; and out of his findings there developed the story (which you probably all remember) *Nicholas Nickleby.* And that is, apart from a picture of life of the Nickleby family, a graphic and for the most part accurate picture of school conditions in the Yorkshire country of the nineteenth century. The conditions there were in many ways simply indescribable. The students, the boys, the pupils -- call them what you will -- were dying because of malnutrition, non-nutrition. Frequently they were whipped so that they died as a result of the whippings. Now this may seem like a kind of emotional picture of the conditions, but actually they existed. There was one famous man -- you may have met him in the pages of *Nicholas Nickleby* -- his name was Wackford Squeers. Dickens says though normal human nature is addicted to two eyes he had but one, and the one could do as much service in his case, I think, as the two in most others. He was a kind of human monster. He whipped the boys because he seemed to get .a kind of pleasure out of it. He fed them ill because he wanted his profits.

His wife and the rest of the family gave little attention or little care to the boys who were living there. You may remember, if you read the story, the new boys' coming into the school and the first thing that is done, their clothes are taken to be tried on young Squeers. If they fit him then they did not go back to the students. That is, of course, just another facet of the picture of profits which Dickens wanted to paint. The story of *Nicholas Nickleby* will give you all that very graphically and I should advise you to read it if you want to get a good picture of the conditions in the Yorkshire schools, the private schools of those days. There was one man in that section of the world who said, "That picture in *Nicholas Nickleby* is a picture of me. I'm going to sue Mr. Dickens." Of course wisdom prevailed; his friends said, "If that's a picture of you, keep quiet!" Which I think was a little wiser than the idea of bringing it to suit.

Well, that is one novel which is dedicated to this whole idea of doing something about schools. But in most of his novels there is more than incidental attention given to the need for education. You have in *David Copperfield* (which I am sure most of you may have read in high school) a

picture of the Salem House School in which the headmaster was Mr. Creakle. Mr. Creakle belonged to the same tribe as Wackford Squeers; he was motivated largely by meanness and profit. That was the school to which David Copperfield was sent after he and his stepfather had a falling-out. But in that same book of *David Copperfield* you get a picture of Dr. Strong's school. Dr. Strong was a good schoolmaster. He was kind; he was motivated by kindness and sympathy. He educated his boys so that they knew something going forth from his school. So Dickens gives you those two pictures in the one book, and it isn't simply by chance or accident. I think it's there, and there by design.

As a matter of fact, Dickens because of his interest in education used to do a great deal of visiting around the schools in London and outside; and this is something he had to say about school teachers and their motivation:

> Let nobody suppose that any scheme of education can attain its end as a mere scheme apart from the qualifications of those persons by whom it is carried out. Very young children can be trained successfully by no person who lacks a hearty liking for them and who can take part only with a proud sense of restraint in their chatter and their play. It is, in truth, no condescension to become in spirit as a child with children and nobody is fit to teach the young who holds a different opinion.

That is Dickens and Dickens's conviction during his adult life with regard to teaching.

His sympathy for children, I suppose, did much to provoke his interest in education, but he didn't stop even at education, though he thought it very necessary. If you recall, he became a friend of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. Burdett-Coutts was a very rich banking firm in London. Coutts Bank is very well-known, or was then. And the Baroness, Mrs. Burdett-Coutts, was a very charitable lady. She wanted to dispense her charity sensibly and where it would do the most good, and have the most lasting effect. So, because of Dickens's interests in the poor, and his interest in children, she enlisted his aid. He became what is called her almoner; he dispensed her charity. In his attempt to do this he helped to establish what were called in the nineteenth century the "ragged schools." He is not in any sense the founder of the ragged schools; but he is one of those who followed the founder, who did much to improve the lot of the children.

London was filled in that day with children who were called street arabs. They had no homes. As far as they knew they had no mothers or fathers. There was certainly nobody who accepted the responsibility for their welfare or even for their existence. So they simply roamed the streets. Now, the ragged schools were not a cure but they were a kind of palliative. They were set up in the congested parts of London, particularly East London, and some attempt was made to teach these boys and girls a little writing, a little reading, a little spelling. The girls were taught such things as sewing. Now I say, it wasn't much, and yet is was a beginning in the right direction because not until much later was the public school system founded by law in England. So until such time something had to be done, and Dickens helped to do it. I say that only to show you that Dickens's interest in the poor and in the children was not an interest which was manufactured to bring him profit, to make his novels popular, or to make them profitable for him; but rather it

was something that was inside him, so much a part of his heart and soul that he simply had to give expression to it.

Now Dickens I called an optimist –he was all of that, as you must see now. He was, in addition, a humorist. He was, I think, in many ways one of the funniest men who ever lived. He could be funnier in what he said and the way he said it a little better, a little more completely and perfectly than anybody in his generation. You don't need any further proof of those statements than the *Pickwick Papers* and many of the *Sketches by Boz.* Now, the *Sketches* belong to his very early writing life. As a matter of fact, some of them were the first things he published, the first things which saw the print of day. But after the sketches were written, published, and popular he saw that his life was to be led along literary paths. But people were not interested so much in his sociological treatment of the conditions of his day; they were interested in him because he was humorous, because he could make a joke, he could appreciate a joke. The *Pickwick Papers* are in many ways -- though they have their poignant moments as most of Dickens's work does – in many ways they are simply a compendium of funny incidents, characters with very good senses of humor, characters who made their own jokes and lived their own jokes and, I suppose we may say, communicated the fun of them to Dickens's readers. The *Pickwick Papers* established Dickens pretty firmly and it was after the publication of these papers, of this story, that Dickens realized that he had a hold on the English reading public; and since he did have that hold upon them he could pretty well as he wished hammer out his own human and humane theses regarding the poor and their betterment, their improvement at the hands of Parliament.

In addition to being a humorist he was a hater of what we today call red tape. You have a perfect picture of that in the story of *Little Dorrit* where he gives you a whole chapter devoted to a place which he calls the Circumlocution Office, where they contrived how not to do things that ought to be done. In *Little Dorrit* he takes such bureaucrats and politicians through their paces and he shows them up for what they were largely in that day -- a rather slow-going crowd who were more interested in their own advancement than in the advancement of the people. He himself said one time, "My faith in Parliament is very limited; my faith in the people is illimitable." When he became a very successful man he was urged by his friends to run for Parliament. It would have been handed to him on a platter had he wished a place in Parliament; but he did not like the way the Parliament was conducted in England in that day, nor would he be a part of it. So he never did became a public official; though he could have many times (in distinction to poor old Thackeray who was dying to become a public officeholder and never succeeded in doing so.)

He used to go around to the courts of London. There was one very famous police station – called then as it is today, I think, the Bow Street Police Station -- and most of the cases that began there ended in the courts of London itself. He used to go there frequently so that he might do something about the little children who were brought before the magistrates. It was hard to believe that children not tall enough even to reach the magistrate's desk would be brought before the magistrate for such things as stealing money or stealing a loaf of bread. In one case he speaks of two little children, whose heads scarcely reached the top of the dock, were charged at Bow Street with stealing a loaf out of a baker's shop. They said in defense that they were starving, and their appearance showed that they spoke the truth. They were sentenced to be whipped in the House of Correction. Dickens goes on, "To be whipped! Can the state devise no better sentence

for its little children? Will it never sentence them to be *taught?"* And that is the way he worked hard for the development of a spirit of understanding among the members of Parliament; but it was not until 1870 that the Public Education Act came into being and came into operation. And if you remember, that was the year that poor old Dickens died, as I said, prematurely.

He did much, therefore, to bring into the minds of the English public an understanding of, and a sense of sympathy for, children. If you have done any reading in the eighteenth century and the seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century, you will find mighty few instances where children appear; if they do appear, they appear most casually and incidentally. It seems to me that it is for the first time in Dickens's books that you meet children who become important as children, and whose development becomes a part, an important part, of the Dickens's story. That is not to say that there are not other books in which you find children once in a while (as I think you do probably in my friend Jane Austen. But there not too frequently, and almost never do you find a *few* children. The babies in the Tower, maybe, in Shakespeare?) For the first time, in any case, I think the children are understood and written of as if they were understood and known by the writer and the people who were reading the writer. It may well be that he had a great deal to do with the changed attitude of the English people toward their children, so that during the time of World War I they did their best to get their children out of England into Canada and to the United States where they might be kept safely for the course of the war, and returned to England at the end of the war. He probably had a great deal to do with that changed attitude, that development of sympathy for the children and the children's rights.

Besides his theses regarding education and regarding children he has many pictures of what we would call family affection and family love. I suppose they belong to the same category because they are based upon an understanding of the family gathering and what one member of the family can mean to another member of the family. Not only in *The Old Curiosity Shop* do you find that -- though you find it there probably to a much greater degree -- but even in *Nicholas Nickleby* again you find it in the Nickleby family. You find it in most of the stories, particularly in the story of *Dombey and Son.* Now *Dombey and Son* is in many ways, according to those who are in a position to develop a critique, *Dombey and Son* is one of Dickens's most perfect novels from a structural standpoint. You know there is one great weakness that you are bound to find in a Dickens novel as you read: is a kind of – well, I won't call it a lack of continuity – but there is an unevenness you'll meet sometimes. And that is due to the fact that Dickens wrote and published his stories in parts, monthly parts. He might write three or four chapters which will be published next week, then he will have to pursue three or four more for the next part which will be published a month from now. That could make for, once his first three or four chapters are gone forth, he has in a sense committed himself so that he can't change things; and the same is true when the next four or five chapters come along. So he limits his freedom of action because he *has* committed himself in the previous publications. There is that unevenness. But in *Dombey and Son* we are told we have a novel, in many senses, structurally perfect. But despite that, the strength of *Dombey and Son* comes from his picture of the love of sister for brother in the lives of Florence and Paul Dombey.

Mr. Dombey was a man in business in the city, a very rich man undoubtedly, a man dedicated to the prosecution of business for the profit it would bring him, which is a laudable ambition, a laudable goal. But anything that interfered with that was just not to be allowed to obtrude itself in

the life of the Dombey family. Now, little Paul evidently took after his mother, because he did not understand any of these things nor did he appreciate them. There is one very beautiful picture, a meeting between the father and the little son Paul, and little Paul asked the father, "What is money?" And the father, very happy to give young Paul a lesson in economics, began to tell him about pounds and shillings and pence, and so on. But little Paul said, "That isn't what I mean. What can money *do?"* And the father again expatiated: money could buy what you wanted, it gives you the pleasures you needed, it could bring the doctor in when the family was sick, it could take you to the seashore.in the summertime. And little Paul said, "If money can do all those things, why didn't it save my mama? Why did my mama die?" The father Dombey was stopped in his tracks because he had to confess there was a limitation to the value of money, that it couldn't bring him everything that he wished for.

Again, in the picture of *Dombey and Son* you have the story of little Paul going to various schools where he was supposed to pick up two things: an education and health. He was not a strong boy. Those little schools are pictured for you again because Dickens was so interested in education. He went first to Mrs. Pipchin. (His [Dickens'] names are sometimes very alliterative, they are onomatopoetic, I think. They really mean more than they say.) She said [Mrs. Pipchin] she would open little Paul's mind just as you open an oyster; and she would feed him by remembering to give him all the things he didn't like since they were good for him, and to keep away from him all the things which he did like since the assumption would be that they were *not* good for him. So he went from that little school to that of Dr. Blimmer. Now, Dr. Blimmer had another theory regarding education. He developed his little students as a gardener develops green peas in a hothouse for the winter season. Conditions there were a little better. At least the Blimmer family lived a normal life and they attempted to give the children a normal kind of life. But the kind of education was simple a filling up with information, not a development of the mind nor an honest acquisition of knowledge but rather sure and crude memory work from beginning to the end. So *Dombey and Son* then again, is devoted to Dickens's theses on the proper kind of education.

But I mention *Dombey and Son* so that you may see what Dickens means when he says that England is based upon, it's built upon, it's founded upon good family life and good family living. The goodness comes from the honest affection of one member of the family for the others. Now Florence Dombey, or Floy as she was called, was beloved of Paul and Paul was beloved of her. The father did not understand either one of them very well. The father was a businessman who wanted the oldest child to be a son who could be the "and Company" in Dombey and Company. Because Florence happened to be a girl she got poor attention from her father. Paul came along. He was to be the "and Company" in Dombey and Company. But he was not at all attuned to the idea of business or a commercial life.

Because Dickens understands life so much I think probably we can say, too, he understands death more than a great many people, a great many writers. You see that in the little scene of Paul Dombey's death. I am not going to spoil that by speaking at great length about it but rather am telling you to read that little chapter in *Dombey and Son.* If you read that alone I am sure you will go back and read all of the story of the Dombey family. It is a poignant picture, beautifully limned by Dickens. (You might say it's a little bit over-emotional for the twentieth century and therefore you don't "dig" it; but try and "dig" it! It's worth-while getting.) There is another

picture of the death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* which will, I think, help further to give you an idea of how well Dickens understood life and death. As he said, we bemoan the fact that there is such an old, old fashion as death; but thank God for the fact that there is another old, old fashion called eternity. His pictures there are rather well-drawn.

In the story of *Bleak House* you have a rather strongly-drawn picture of Dickens's attitude toward the law, the lawmakers, the lawyers, and even some of the slow-going judges of his day. The story of *Bleak House* is written around a family called Jarndyce. Now the Jarndyces had been bothered for years and years, generations and generations, by a will. ([You've heard of] *Jarndyce versus Jarndyce*.) It was settled, and as the story opens it is still dragging its length along, simply muddling and confusing the present generation of Jarndyce and doing not much better for the generation to come. As the story develops you find that in the end the court costs have simply swallowed up the monies and properties and real estate involved in the will itself; so that after all the time and attention and energy are wasted, are spent upon the settlement of the will, there is no money to pursue it further and those who depended upon it are left penniless, without money. Dickens, therefore, in this story attacks the laws which make law so ridiculous, at least as they were ridiculous in their attention towards wills and testaments, which made the courts indifferent (as he thought them) to the justice and fairness of things. This story again is well worth reading because like most of Dickens's stories it has many episodes which, while they belong to the story, could be left out without spoiling the integrity of the story and yet they are enjoyable and interesting.

One thing you'll probably notice about Dickens, if you have not noticed already, is the multiplicity of characters – the man's ability to draw characters almost limitless in number, and yet you don't confuse them in your mind. They never merge; their identifications never get lost in your thinking. They may be almost the same, but they are not almost the same. They have their individuating notes so one never becomes the other. One is never confused with the other or with the others. No man that I can remember has quite the ability to play with character as Dickens, to do it so successfully as he has done it. And I think *Bleak House* is the perfect example of that and even more probably the story of *The Pickwick Papers*.

Now Dickens did much to give new meaning to the idea of Christmas during his day as an Englishman. They used to say that he and Washington Irving probably played a large part in the non-spiritual aspects of ceremony in taking care of the Christmas festival. He believed in it firmly. That, of course, is the measure of his worth as a family man. He believed that it should do a great deal for people spiritually. His writings indicate that. That is where he said so well that we meet on Christmas Day as we should meet on all days of the year, fellow human beings going to the same place, we hope. The other three hundred and sixty-four days seem to be given over to bitterness, invective, hate, and dislike, and so on. If we can do that on Christmas Day or during the Christmas season, why is it not possible for us to do it for the three hundred and sixty-five days? To do away with hate, to do away with venom, and probably in the end to do away with some of the causes of war?

Dickens is in many ways like Shakespeare. I am not going off the deep end and compare the two of them as Stephen Leacock has attempted to do; but he has some of Shakespeare's virtues. He wrote for the Victorian period and yet, for all that, he was timeless. We must never approach

Dickens with the feeling: “Well, he didn’t write in the twentieth century, therefore he’s going to be old-fashioned, or there are going to be things that I’m not going to understand or appreciate.” There is nothing like that in Dickens. He was insular as all Englishmen are insular, in that they live on an island and are to that extent separated from the rest of the world. But he was for all people; he wrote for all people, and he is understood by all people. And because he was a humorist as well as a sociologist he could use his smile to evoke tears; and I suppose we may say on the other hand that his sadness was a very important part of his writings. In any case, it is impossible to evaluate Mr. Dickens in fifty minutes except to say that, “There he is, and he’s yours for the reading, and how can you deprive yourself of the great pleasures that awaits you in the pages of any Dickens story.”

[Applause]